

BEHIND THE BADGE 1-18-2004

Yesterday I had some outpatient surgery at Alegent Health Mercy Hospital, so today I am writing this from my home under the influence of some pain medicine. Hopefully this will make some sense when it's finished.

The surgery was no big deal but I did have to undergo general anesthesia. That was the second time in my life that I had to go completely under.

Now if you are like me, you do not like the concept of general anesthesia. I have never talked to anyone who has had the experience that wanted to do it again.

It certainly beats the alternative, however, of being awake when they do the surgery. I would just as soon not watch what they are doing to me.

I have been thinking about why people don't like to go under. I suppose if they are like me, they don't like the inability to control what happens to them.

When you are out, you are at the mercy of other people. Granted they are professional doctors and nurses, but you still have lost control of your life for those few minutes.

During that time you are betting your life on the fact that those people will do their job with skill and professionalism.

During my time working the street, I often saw people place themselves at the mercy of others because they had lost the ability to think for themselves or defend themselves.

It wasn't because they were being operated on by highly skilled doctors and nurses. It was because they had become so intoxicated that they had no idea where they were or what they were doing.

They often became victims of crimes because of their intoxication. They became an easy mark for a criminal and then could not help us solve the crime because of their intoxication.

I could never understand why people would become that drunk in public. You are just asking for trouble. Even if you are with friends, if they are drinking also they will lose the ability to make good decisions, which could have a negative impact on you.

I guess the bottom line is, don't lose the ability to make your own decisions and take care of yourself unless you enjoy being a victim.

Going back to depending on the doctors and nurses when you are out, I guess I have trusted my life to other people during my entire careers as a police officer.

When you work the street you are very dependent on the other officers out there with you to back you up and protect you. There are times every day on the street when your life depends on your fellow officers and their skill.

That is one of the reasons you have the camaraderie and the feeling of a brotherhood when you are a police officer. Knowing that your well-being depends on your fellow officers goes a long way toward building those feelings. There are few other professions where you have that same level of camaraderie. Soldiers and firefighters come to mind, but if you are a police officer you depend on that everyday.

It looks like I have kind of wandered around here. I' ll blame the pain medicine.

I guess I' ve tried to make two points: One, if you are going to lose the ability to take care of yourself, do it in a hospital, not a bar, and second, depending on others for their well-being is something that police officers do everyday.

- Keith Mehlin is chief of the Council Bluffs Police Department